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'Ladies present!': an auto/ethnographic study of women amateur golfers at an English provincial golf club

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‘Ladies present!’: an auto/ethnographic study of women amateur golfers at an English provincial golf club

Despite high general participation rates in golf in England and a raft of initiatives to encourage more women and younger players into golf, fewer than one in five amateur golfers in England is female and there is a real dearth of young women entering the sport. Sexist policies and practices have been posited as possible barriers to women’s and girls’ grass-roots participation in golf, but to date little qualitative research has been undertaken on the lived experiences of recreational women players themselves. To address this considerable gap, an 18-month ethnographic and autoethnographic research project was undertaken within a case study club in the English East Midlands. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with thirteen amateur women-players, ethnographic observations, detailed autoethnographic field notes and video auto-reflections, this article explores some of the key themes that emerged from the research, utilising primarily Foucauldian-feminist theoretical perspectives to frame the qualitative findings. The two key themes selected for analysis here are: 1) women’s lived experience of corporeal surveillance in golfing contexts; and: 2) discursive othering and objectification of women in golf.

Keywords: women’s golf; ethnography; autoethnography; Foucault; surveillance

Introduction

In the English context, whilst the percentage of women participating in sport at least once a week stands at 30.5%, the percentage of female participants who take part in golf at least once weekly stands at just over 15% (Sport England 2012, 2013). This is despite high general participation rates by men in golf, and a whole raft of initiatives to encourage more women and younger players into the game (Golf Foundation 2015). Particularly noticeable is the dearth of *young* women entering the sport in England. The reasons for such female under-representation are interesting to investigate, as golf would appear, potentially at least, to be a gender-integrated sport (McGinnis *et al.*, 2005). We wanted to seek the perspectives of English women golfers themselves.

Although there are interesting qualitative studies undertaken in the United States, including Crosset's (1995) detailed ethnographic research into professional women golfers of the Ladies' Professional Golf Association (LPGA), in the English context there has been surprisingly little qualitative research on elite women golfers (Douglas 2009, 2014), and there is a real research lacuna in relation to female recreational players, as has been noted (Chambers, 1995; McGinnis *et al.* 2005 2009; Wright 2008; Wood and Danylchuk 2011). We sought to address this gap, and analogous to McGinnis *et al.* (2005), we also were interested to investigate whether women recreational golfers experience the sexism and tokenism reported by women professional golfers (see e.g., Crosset 1995). Our small-scale auto/ethnographic study was therefore undertaken in order to examine the lived experience of recreational women golfers in a particular golf club situated on the outskirts of a city within the English East Midlands. Given the ethnographic case study design, the aim of the research was to investigate in-depth the club culture and the women's experiences from their own perspective, rather than to make claims regarding generalizability of experience or club culture. The autoethnographic component focuses on the experiences of the first author, Stacey, who is a young female golfer at the club under study.

To explore the key themes that emerged, we have structured the article first to consider some of the extant literature surrounding women in golf, particularly in the English context. We then portray the theoretical perspectives utilised to analyse our findings. The auto/ethnographic research project itself is then described, to give a feel for S's (as the autoethnographic researcher) own positioning in the research site, before presenting some of the salient findings cohering around the themes of the lived experience of surveillance, and the discursive othering and objectification of women at the golf club.

The English golf context

Women are greatly under-represented in English golf in terms of both general participation levels, and also in golf club membership. Haig-Muir (2002) notes that golf clubs have been identified as amongst the worst offenders in terms of discrimination against women, whilst Chambers (1995) points out that historically women have been denied membership of many golf clubs. The situation has been slow to improve, and even in 2014, the Board of Directors and Officials of The Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) was exclusively male (PGA 2013). As many have argued (e.g. Maas and Hasbrook 2001; Moss 2001; McGinnis and Gentry 2006; Lenkiewicz 2011), golf remains a highly gendered domain, not only in relation to gender segregation in competitions and matches, which is still prevalent in England, but even vis-à-vis the specific times when women and men are permitted to play on a particular course (Moss 2001). Notoriously, too, the famous Royal St. George's Golf Club in England at one time displayed a sign indicating 'No Dogs and Women' (Chambers 1995: 24). In the United States, not until 2012 did the Augusta National Golf Club admit female members, and only as recently as September 2014 did The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrew's in Scotland, known as the 'home of golf', vote to admit women as members, for the first time in its long history.

Many practices within golf club cultures are grounded in discourses surrounding gendered expectations and characteristics (Pfister and Hartmann-Tews 2003) that construct women as naturally having inferior strength and skill in relation to men. It is often (**wrongly**) assumed that women players cannot drive the ball as far as men players can, and so conventionally women have been required to 'tee off' from 'forward' locations nearer to the hole. Interestingly, as Hundley (2004) highlights, tee box

nomenclature on golf scorecards traditionally designates the location from which ‘ladies’ should tee off for each hole, which also on some courses corresponds with the same location as for junior golfers – that is, the red or forward tees. For men, however, the designation of tees is determined by ability, not gender: so men can elect to tee off from the yellow ‘men’s tees’ or the white tees, depending upon standard of play. The white tee is used for most competitions and A-team matches but is specifically for the men. In addition, on the top-level ‘championship’ courses in England there is also a more challenging ‘professional’ tee normally used for tournaments, but interestingly, this is also often constructed as for men. This system may no longer be widespread in the United States, and is gradually beginning to change in the English context, but nevertheless it does continue to prevail in many English clubs. Similarly, gendered assumptions also underpin the golf ‘handicapping’ system. The system is used to enable golfers of all abilities to compete on as equal a basis as possible, by ‘handicapping’ the higher ability players; the higher the handicap, the more ‘allowance’ is made to a player in terms of strokes required to complete the course. Furthermore, it is often assumed that women play more slowly than men, taking longer to complete the same course (Maas and Hasbrook 2001; McGinnis *et al.* 2005), as we discuss in detail below in relation to our key findings.

The above practices work within golfing culture to differentiate players on the basis of gender, and modernising changes at the organisational level of English golf have been slow to be operationalized. Entrenched gender-segregation in place in English Golf was to some extent challenged in 2012 when The English Golf Union (EGU) and The English Women’s Golf Association (EWGA) united to form England Golf (England Golf 2013), whose rules now require one of the three presidency positions to be held by a woman. This organisational shift, however, appears to have

had only limited impact upon the distinctive subcultural climate of golf ‘on the ground’, where negative, oppressive stereotypes of women-golfers still appear to prevail.

With regard to the ethnographic literature on women’s golf in the English context, there is a distinct dearth of qualitative literature in general in this domain, with extant research primarily focused upon elite women players (see for example, Douglas 2009, 2014; Douglas and Carless 2006; Hill and Hemmings, 2015). The current study was therefore initiated in order to address this gap in the literature, and to focus specifically upon the experiences of non-elite, recreational women players at an ‘ordinary’, ‘working-class’ (as participants described it) golf club in a provincial town in the East Midlands of England. Before proceeding to describe the research site and the ethnographic and autoethnographic study, we first provide a brief overview of the Foucauldian-feminist and, secondarily, feminist-phenomenological theoretical perspectives, which we subsequently employed to frame our analysis.

Theoretical perspectives

In the study, we wanted to examine in-depth participants’ experiences, including their lived-bodies as contoured by the social expectations operating within the discourse of the specific sporting culture (Theberge 1991) in which they were located. Combining a Foucauldian-feminist framework with a feminist form of phenomenological sociology (Allen-Collinson 2011, 2012) provided us with a robust theoretical combination to explore participants’ lived experiences of golf whilst acknowledging the power of the gendered discourses operating upon them. Foucauldian feminist approaches have been utilised effectively in research exploring gender within sport generally (see for example, Markula 2003; Markula-Denison and Pringle 2006; Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010; McMahon and Penney 2013; Evans and Allen-Collinson B 2014).

For Foucault (1972: 27), the term ‘discourse’ is applied not only to statements (spoken and written) but also to practices and ‘happenings’, including types and modes of conversation. With reference to the sporting context, Markula-Denison and Pringle (2006) highlight how discourse produces conventional order and routines regulating how an individual thinks and behaves, so that societal norms become internalised via (gender) socialisation. Discourses act to normalise the language and cultural practices of dominant groups in society (Cole *et al.* 2004), and within sports – as in wider society - it has been argued by feminist scholars that it is white men who often constitute the dominant group. The ‘panoptic’¹ quality of Foucauldian power means that individuals self-regulate and discipline their own bodies and behaviour, so that their bodies become ‘docile’: liable to be subjected, used, transformed and improved (Foucault, 1979:136). Furthermore, the interplay of self-knowledge and discursive practices ensures that most individuals remain largely unaware of the network of power relations that serves to constrain them and their behaviour (Barker-Ruchti and Tinning 2010).

Foucauldian feminists have highlighted how normalising practices regulate, discipline and contour women’s bodies in particular to a point of docility (e.g. McMahon and Penny 2013, in relation to competitive swimming). Gendered discourses produce a myriad of femininities, which operate with different intensities spatio-temporally, and render the individual self unstable, disunited, and subject to change (Pringle and Markula 2005). A multiplicity of different, and sometimes conflicting and

¹ The original concept of the ‘panopticon’ is that of a central, all-seeing surveillance tower in the center of a prison, which is built so that windows into the prisoners’ cells enable the guard in the panopticon to see into all prison cells whilst the guard remains invisible to the prisoners.

contested gendered identities can thus co-exist (Azzarito 2009; Evans and Allen-Collinson 2014).

For Foucault, the body is conceptualised as the link between daily practices and the larger-scale operation of power, but the body in his work is not really analysed in any depth in terms of the ‘flesh and blood’ lived body, which provides the focus in forms of more ‘carnal sociology’ (Crossley 1995) and ‘carnal ethnography’ (Wacquant 2014). Drawing on phenomenological sociology (Bird 2009, Allen-Collinson 2009a, 2011) allowed us to explore the lived, embodied realities of our participants, whilst also acknowledging the power of social-structural and cultural frameworks to impact upon those realities. Qualitative researchers within phenomenologically-inspired studies of sport/physical cultures have examined the lived experience of participants in a range of different physical cultures, such as football/soccer (Cook *et al.* 2014), martial arts (Downey 2002), distance running (Allen-Collinson 2011), women’s boxing (Allen-Collinson and Owton 2015). Of particular interest to us, there has been a recent case study of a woman golfer studied via a phenomenological lens (Ravn and Christensen 2014 in this journal). For the purposes of the current article, we employ primarily a Foucauldian-feminist theoretical framework in analysing our key findings relating to surveillance and othering via discourse. In the auto/ethnographic research overall, however, the lived, embodied experience of women golfers was also explored via a phenomenological-sociological perspective.

The research

As Prus (1996) argues in relation to ethnographic research, when researchers are able to gather observational, participant-observation and interview data within a study, this often leads to a deeper understanding of participants’ lived experience. This was the

combined approach we adopted, with the additional element of autoethnographic reflections. Ethical approval was granted by our University department for an 18-month auto/ethnographic project to be undertaken as an in-depth case-study of a golf club within the English East Midlands. Ethical approval and access were also granted by the manager and committee of the golf club in question, of which S, the auto/ethnographic researcher, had been a member for over 10 years. We adopted the principles of the ‘three Rs’ approach of culturally Responsible, Relational, Reflexive ethics, as posited by Lahman *et al.* (2011). This approach advocates recognising and valuing cultural differences, demonstrating respect for and valuing relationships with participants and the social group under study, and being reflexive, including in relation to power dynamics in the research relationship (see also Smith *et al.* 2009). Being an experienced member of the golfing culture under investigation, it was decided that in order to heighten reflexivity, S would engage in sociological ‘bracketing’ (see Allen-Collinson 2011) from the inception of the study, in order to identify and challenge some of her presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding golf, and women’s golf in particular. This methodological approach is particularly useful for ‘insider’ ethnographers, to help identify experiences conceptualised as ‘normal’ and mundane from an insider perspective, and to re-frame these as ‘strange’ (Allen-Collinson 2013). Holding extensive discussions with the two other research team members, J and A, neither of whom is a golfer, was productive in terms of challenging and deeply questioning S’s tacit understandings and assumptions regarding golf.

In order to protect the identity of the club and our participants, we have avoided providing too much information about the club itself as there are few golf clubs in the vicinity of our University location. In the extracts that follow, pseudonyms have been given to all participants, and identifying characteristics of persons, role and place have

as far as possible been removed, to protect anonymity. Whilst the club is a private members' club, elements of which date back to the 1890s, it is generally considered locally to provide a welcoming and relatively informal ambience, and to encourage visiting players and those wishing to enjoy the hospitality facilities. It is locally constructed as not being 'exclusive' and 'posh' (in participants' terminology), but is seen as primarily 'working-class', as participants explained.

As a member of the club for over 10 years, S had relatively easy access to the research setting, having built up relationships and rapport with potential participants, in some cases over many years prior to the research. The club had around 60 female members at the time of the study, with female membership remaining fairly stable and representing approximately 13% of overall membership. Although it is not possible to ascertain precisely why female membership remained generally buoyant, it is possible that the relatively informal atmosphere at the club could be argued to promote inclusivity vis-à-vis gender. Potential participants were invited via both face-to-face and telephone contact to take part in semi-structured interviews. Eventually, 13 participants were chosen via purposive sampling; details of participants and their handicap, length of case-study club membership and time in golf are given in Table 1 below. Sampling criteria were: being a female golfer, having full membership of the golf club, being aged 18 or over, holding a handicap category between one and five in the UK system. For each of the handicap categories, efforts were made to select a novice, intermediate and long-standing club member respectively, in order to generate as much variation as possible with regard to ability and length of golfing experience. 'Novice' golfers were defined as having up to five years' playing experience, 'intermediate' between six and fifteen years, and 'long-standing' had sixteen years' or more experience. Whilst best

efforts were made to recruit evenly across all the handicap categories, it was not possible to achieve a complete balance.

All participants were noted in the observations as being regular and frequent players as well as ‘regulars’ in the social life of the club. Whilst all participants were acknowledged as ‘regulars’ within the club, one woman who was 60+ was unable to participate as frequently as others of her age due to mobility problems, and one of the novices was unable to play as regularly as she would have liked, but was highly involved in the culture of the club. We fully acknowledge that the decision to sample primarily by length of time at the club and by handicap does inevitably bring some limitations, for example, we do not have ‘official’ information regarding participants’ age of entry to golf, any dual or multiple membership of other clubs, or the degree to which they had reduced their handicap whilst based at the case-study club. As a long-standing member of the case-study club, the first author, Stacey (hereafter known as ‘S’), had ‘informal’ knowledge regarding some of this information, but it was not employed specifically for the purposes of sample construction.

[Table 1 here]

Semi-structured interviews were carried out by S in a quiet café location near to the golf club, but far away enough to ensure that no other club members were present, as we sought to avoid interviewees feeling constrained by the possibility of being overheard by other club members. Interviews lasted between 30 and 80 minutes (with an average of 48 minutes) and were recorded with a Dictaphone. Participants were offered considerable opportunity to explore issues that they felt were significant to them without undue imposition of the researcher’s own agenda (see also, Fylan 2005), and so

S conversed with participants in a relaxed and informal style, usually over a cup of coffee or tea, encouraging interviewees to direct the conversation themselves.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by S immediately, or as soon as possible post-interview. Transcriptions were subjected to thematic data analysis via axial coding, followed by collating first-order codes into higher-order themes (Sparkes and Smith 2014). Emergent themes and interpretations were discussed and debated within the research team, and the applicability of a Foucauldian perspective emerged as a strong framework for the findings during these discussions.

As an experienced golfer, and having played for over 10 years at the golf club under study, S already enjoyed 'insider' status. Having an autoethnographic (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2001, Holman Jones *et al.* 2013, Rambo 2007) component to the research, we considered, would enrich and deepen the findings, and also encourage her to reflect critically on her experiences as a woman golfer. There are certainly challenges in combining ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches (see for example, Allen-Collinson and Owton 2014) as they can generate different levels of depth and richness of description. There are also, however, advantages in having the reflections of a culturally-attuned insider alongside the comments of other participants in the ethnographic site. Inevitably, of course, both the ethnographic and the autoethnographic accounts presented are somewhat partial and incomplete, for even the most 'inside' of insider-researchers can never claim to represent the views or experiences of all those within the social group under study (Allen-Collinson 2012, 2013).

For the autoethnographic component of the research, alongside field notes, taken over a period of 18 months at the club, both in the clubhouse and also out on the course, S also recorded 'video notes' on her home webcam as soon as possible after events. Field notes were recorded via notebooks and also mobile phone and Dictaphone. The

autoethnographic analytic video reflections varied between five and 45 minutes, recorded on a total of 28 occasions and also incorporated evocative narratives and diary-type entries. Originally, the autoethnographic reflections were intended to be recorded over a period of around six months, but it became apparent towards the end of the 6-month period that new themes were still emerging, which needed to be pursued until data saturation was considered to be achieved after a further three months. S recorded not only real-time experiences and events, but also memories from throughout her 10 years of playing at the club, often triggered by events and occurrences in the present-day of the research. As is often the case with autoethnography and other automethodologies, the researcher's own lived experiences intertwined with those of other members of the ethnographic group under study (see also Allen-Collinson 2012). Furthermore, as interviewees began sharing their experiences, their thoughts and expressed feelings acted as prompts and reminders for S, who subsequently reflected on her own current and past feelings and emotions. As Wetherell (2012) argues, the process of recollection is itself a form of 'affective practice'.

Key findings

Whilst a vast wealth of ethnographic and autoethnographic data emerged from the study, one of the most salient findings was the women's experience, as recounted, of being under surveillance when out on the course, but also in the clubhouse. Many participants described feeling highly visible *as women* (rather than as golfers), and very uncomfortable that their appearance and social behaviour were being subjected to scrutiny and critique, particularly by male players. A secondary key theme relating to feelings of being objectified and 'othered' within golf also surfaced in many participant

accounts. We consider these themes below and note their linkage with extant literature on golf and also with Foucauldian-feminist accounts of other sporting contexts.

The lived experience of surveillance

As emerged clearly from the data, many of the women golfers, including S herself, reported intense experiences of feeling scrutinised and under surveillance from men, not only out on the course, but also in the clubhouse. Participants expressed at times feeling vulnerable and ‘exposed’ to the critical gaze of men, and, on rare occasions, of other women players. These feelings were particularly acute when the women felt watched from the large clubhouse windows overlooking long sections of the course. Commensurate with Foucauldian analyses, participants were not always sure whether they were actually being watched at any one time, but had strong suspicions, which served to generate feelings of being surveilled:

....you just sort of knew they were watching ... (Kristeen, novice member, handicap category 4)

As S herself recorded in detail:

I was going down the 16th hole today and I get that feeling that I always get when I play down there to the hole. The clubhouse with its glazing windows streaming all the way along, is parallel adjacent about 50 yards or so away and I am aware people can visibly and fully see me playing down the fairway....I imagine a row of people stood at that window, staring up to me whilst I am playing this hole. I mean I know that you may, on occasions, get one or two people stood at the

window watching out onto the course in general, but never do you get an audience such as what I imagine. I just can't seem to shake off [the feeling] that people are there because there's every possibility there is someone there watching out...

When I get to the overhanging tree that hides me away and towards the green away from the sight of the clubhouse, I feel a sense of relief from the pressurised tense feeling that had built up inside me (Autoethnographic reflection 11)

Whilst novice members might perhaps be expected to experience nervousness and fear of looking foolish in front of other players, long-standing club members also reported this feeling, which made some intensely self-conscious and nervous about playing their shots. Sam, a novice member of the club, noted during an interview:

I was just nervous because I didn't want to look stupid....I just didn't want people to take the 'mick' out of me, really.... [I was] just really nervous and worried about what everyone else, how everyone else saw me. (Sam novice member with no handicap)

S's field notes also testify to the *gendered* dimension of Sam's anxiety, given that when men were 'accompanied' by a woman, Sam clearly appeared untroubled, but when it was only men watching, her anxiety levels increased visibly to such a level they compromised her performance:

She [Sam] was physically looking around to check where people were. It was like she had to know where everybody was and if they could see her playing golf. She saw this husband and wife who are both members and she was quite fine about

that and wasn't particularly bothered....However, when we were on the 14th green and 15th tee box, she turned around and saw there were two middle-aged men and one young male golfer and these are regular players at the club. All of a sudden when they were there, she was like all shocked and it seemed as though she was physically in shock and she was like: 'Oh no. I'm going to have to wait. I'm going to have to wait until they've gone so they can't see me,' and she physically could not hit the ball until she knew they weren't there or watching. (Field note)

Interestingly, the more experienced participants, whom we might have expected to be less 'put off' their play, also reported feeling analogous performance pressures in front of male golfers. For example, an intermediate player, Wendy, explained:

[If] it's a male, I wouldn't want to play with them. I'd feel embarrassed. I'd think I'd have to hit this ball really hard. I'd have to make sure I hit this ball. Just like when they've called you through or something [I'm thinking] 'I better make sure I hit this ball' or somebody's waiting for you to hit the ball because you've gone on their fairway and you're thinking, 'I've got to hit this ball really well.'
(Wendy, intermediate, handicap category 5)

When questioned as to the basis of such feelings, many participants explained that they did not wish to be seen to conform to negative gender stereotypes of women golfers as physically 'weak' and 'lacking in ability'. As McGinnis and Gentry (2006) argue, such negative gender stereotyping exerts pressure on women particularly by generating anxiety over executing 'poor' shots that would serve only to confirm the original negative gender stereotype. Although Maas and Hasbrook (2001: 22) argue that,

‘physical power determines the length of the golf drive’, physical power is not the only requirement of playing well, which also demands good technique, timing, flexibility, and an ability to play short as well as long shots, amongst other things. The success of many small-framed and not physically ‘strong’ players (such as Korean women golfers) testifies to the importance of a plethora of factors other than sheer physical power. The notion of the importance of physical strength was, however, perpetuated by some of the women themselves:

... they [men and women] can’t really compete because they [women] physically haven’t the same strength....They’re [women are] just not quite as strong (Julie, long-standing, handicap category 5)

As McGinnis *et al.* (2005: 314) note in relation to the United States context, women’s visibility can be heightened due to the gender imbalance on the golf course, so that, in Foucault’s (1995: 201) terms, women-players might feel in a position of ‘permanent visibility’. The physical layout of the case-study golf course, with long sections open to the gaze of observers in the clubhouse, generated a sense of panopticism amongst women players. This geospatial element of the disciplining of bodies coheres with Foucauldian conceptualisation of ‘the art of distribution’ (that is, the distribution of bodies in space), relating to power relations (see also Evans and Allen-Collinson 2014), particularly gendered power relations. Some women players reported feeling so anxious about their visibility on the course that they engaged in techniques of the self in order to avoid feelings of vulnerability and exposure to the male disciplinary gaze. Sam, for example, was so nervous of being critically scrutinised,

she decided to restrict the times at which she went out on the course, in an attempt to reduce the possibility of being observed at all:

I'd probably be nervous again now when I go back out again....I'll just try and go out when nobody's about (Sam, novice member, no handicap)

Furthermore, commensurate with Bartky's (1988) observation that in contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women, who stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement, participants reported feeling 'judged' by men. They highlighted how male players, even those who were less experienced than the women they 'judged', felt in a position publicly to pass comment on the play of women players, often in a manner that the women reported as patronising:

I've had somebody on the course that's said, and that was a man, and he said; 'I saw you do that...' such and such [shot]. 'You're getting on well now. You are playing better.' (Wendy, intermediate, handicap category 5)

These male players did not apparently pass judgment on unknown men in this patronising and very public way, nor did women players articulate such judgments on unknown women or men.

Participants reported an interesting dimension to surveillance via the practice of video recording by male coaches. Although both women and men were happy to be video-recorded by coaching staff in order to provide visual feedback on technique, for the women players there appeared to be an additional, uncomfortable element of having

their *bodies* scrutinised and subjected to critical evaluation. Luce described her dislike, with the identification of her (golfing technique) faults as ‘the other thing’, not the primary cause of discomfort:

I don’t like it [video recorded coaching]. I don’t like that at all and I don’t know why it is. They [male coaches] film you and of course the other thing is professional teachers see your faults straight away. (Luce, novice, handicap category 5)

Of particular concern to interviewees was the feeling that their *bodies* (rather than just their golfing technique) could be viewed, re-watched, and judged not only by the coaches and/or others doing the immediate recording, but also by ‘unknown’ others, without the women’s permission or even knowledge. S had direct experience of being invited to review another woman’s performance – and also her physique - unbeknown to the player herself. S’s autoethnographic reflections highlight her unease during this process, especially when her fellow player’s physique was discussed:

He [male coach] showed me the video of the woman performing her improving technique, inspecting her bodily movements, physique and technique, as I did.... it makes me wonder if he has shown my videos to anyone else? Now that he has those videos stored on his system, surely there are ways for them to be accessed or has he shown them to others who have seen my improving technique, judging and analysing my body and my movements, as I did of her. (Autoethnographic reflection 24)

The practice of video recording and then critically evaluating the ‘subject’ reflects elements of the Foucauldian-feminist conceptualisation of power relations. As Kerr (2014) argues in relation to the videoing of female gymnasts, the dominant, male ‘regulating’ coaches discipline and ‘correct’ the female subject-recipient to (re)create the embodied techniques of the sport. Male as well as female golf-players were subjected to the critical gaze of the male coaches of course, but interviewees highlighted they felt judged *as women*, in terms of conformity to gender norms regarding body size and shape. Whilst it could well be argued that men as well as women players feel ‘surveilled’ and under pressure to perform on the golf course, women reported feeling objectified, and scrutinised as gendered ‘others’ with golfing contexts, sexualized by men both within the clubhouse and out on the course, rather than treated as players. No analogous findings have emerged to date in the literature that portray the ‘othering’, objectification, and sexualization of male players, at any level of the sport.

Discursive othering and objectification of women in golf

As Koivula (2001) notes in relation to sport, the female body continues to be identified as an object by masculinist culture, and such objectification practices were evident in the golfing contexts we studied. Women players can become ‘open persons’ in Goffman’s (1963) terms, open to inappropriate, sexualised and judgmental ‘street remarks’, rather than to the usual ritual forms of civility accorded to people in public spaces. Brooks Gardner (1980) further underscores the gendered dimensions of such ‘address rights’ whereby men are ‘entitled’ to comment on unknown women in public places, whereas women are not accorded the same ‘rights’ of address. Our participants observed that male players would comment on female players’ bodies, sometimes loudly and in the hearing of the women themselves. Under a Foucauldian feminist

framework, such discourses and practices act as disciplinary mechanisms to keep women 'in their place', identified as other, and constructed as not entitled to be in 'male space'. S's autoethnographic reflections testify to disquiet at being subjected to the male evaluative gaze, to objectification and highly inappropriate, sexualizing remarks:

When you are playing with men, you walk up to the tee box and you play your shots, but they are behind you so they get a full view of your bum [buttocks]. Even if they're in front of you, they then get a full frontal.... I mean ... you know those body parts are more easily seen and they stand out; you know, being a woman. I think the worst thing that reinforces this is when men make comments....about your bum or your legs or something. For example, I remember about 7 or 8 years ago, this guy told me I've 'got a bum like Beyonce', whilst I was wearing my white golf skirt. (Autoethnographic reflection 10)

In one instance, S was the only woman player present in a group of players, when the male captain was heard making comments about women members at the club having 'saggy boobs down to their knees'. Similarly disrespectful discourses regarding women's bodies were also used by male players and even coaches; a male coach discussed swing technique with S, highlighting that on the downswing men's and women's techniques differ because women 'tend to mind the tits'. The nature of this disrespectful discourse and the general objectification of women generated intense discomfort and unease in S. On another occasion at a golfing tournament, a young elite woman golfer of S's age complained to S about men making blatant sexist comments about her body when she was wearing white trousers. These and myriad other instances of discursive objectification and sexualisation of women golfers meant that the women

players experienced their bodies as subject to surveillance and explicit critique in a way that men's bodies clearly were not. This generated a climate where women were 'othered', made to feel that golf was a 'man's game' and 'male space' into which they were somehow intruding.

Other gendered discourses and practices were also found to be in operation. Within the interviews and also during the observations, it emerged there was a general acceptance and normalization of gender divisions and differentiation within the golf club culture. This was exemplified and reinforced by the use of the term 'ladies' for women players, whilst the men were referred to simply as 'men', and not as 'gentlemen'. The women players were also marked by use of the prefix 'lady' within club roles such as captain and coach. The marked/unmarked distinction, derived from linguistics, has been used to analyse the relationship between the 'deviant', stigmatized, non-normative (marked), and the privileged, normative and 'generic' (unmarked) aspects of social identities (Brekhus 2008; Allen-Collinson 2009b). Thus, whilst the captain of the men's team was referred to simply as 'the captain', the captain of the women's team was termed 'the lady captain', and female coaches were often referred to as the 'lady coaches'. This marking as 'other' also extended to events such as 'Ladies' Day' (traditionally on a weekday), signalling this as an unusual and exceptional departure from other days, which thus by default would seem to be designated for men. The overall result of such marking serves not only to distinguish players on the basis of (assumed) gender, but to mark one gender as the 'deviant' one.

Discursive constructions of women as 'other' abounded in the findings from both the interviews and also in field-notes and autoethnographic reflections. In addition to women being automatically defined as 'weaker' players, they were often discursively

construed as 'delicate' by male players, and thus unaccustomed to hearing ribald comments or vulgar language, as an autoethnographic reflection relates:

... if they [men] say something that could be seen as 'inappropriate' around 'ladies', such as swearing, on many occasions, their response is 'ladies present' as if they shouldn't be talking like that in front of us, because we are 'ladies'.

(Autoethnographic reflection 16)

Whilst this might be construed as respectful of women, seeking not to offend them, another interpretation made by interviewees was that the men were actually mocking the women, suggesting that they were 'delicate', 'frail' creatures.

The final element of discursive othering we consider here was a particularly prevalent discourse regarding women's purportedly 'slow play' (see also McGinnis *et al.* 2005). Participants discussed how men often spoke about the slow play of women, and automatically blamed women players for taking too long on the course, even when there was no discernible evidence that it was actually women who were slowing others' progress around the course. Kim, for example, noted:

They [men] don't look further than women to blame. Instead of looking at the groups in front of us and seeing where the hold-up is, they automatically assume it's us [women] (Kim, intermediate, handicap category 3).

Gendered discourses and assumptions about women's play may be derived from the fact that women players generally have shorter driving distances, but such assumptions regarding slow play are highly contestable, given that shorter drives are

often offset by women's increased accuracy (Vamplew 2010). As McGinnis *et al.* (2005) argue pointedly, men's errant long drives can end up slowing down play much more than do women's shorter, more accurate drives. Nevertheless, our participants were acutely conscious of being criticised for slow play, and reported feeling under pressure to speed up, often engaging in techniques of the self in order to regulate their behaviour, such as rushing their shots:

They [the men] have little giles [moaning] sometimes about slow play... 'oh, the women are out. They'll be slow' you feel under pressureyou're thinking; 'I don't want them [the men] to be getting on at us because we're holding them up', so you do tend to rush (Luce, novice, handicap category 5)

McGinnis and Gentry (2006) similarly found that women reported feeling obliged to play faster than men, and faster than they would ideally have preferred, wishing to avoid conforming to sexist stereotypes regarding 'slow play'.

In the above sections, we have highlighted some of the key findings that emerged from the analysis of ethnographic and autoethnographic data relating to the case-study golf club, and we now consider these in terms of wider theoretical application and with regard to policy implications for golfing institutions in the UK.

In conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted and analysed within a Foucauldian-feminist framework the salient findings that emerged from an auto/ethnographic case study of women golfers at a provincial golf club in the East Midlands of England. Although generalisation to wider golfing contexts was never a specific aim of the ethnographic

study, nevertheless, some key themes emerged from the study and may have wider applicability. Furthermore, some of the findings cohere strongly with those from North American studies, suggesting that the case-study golf club is not unusual in being experienced as riven with sexist assumptions regarding women's golfing abilities. S herself, as a long-standing member of the club, came to reflect analytically upon the sexist attitudes and behaviour to which she and other women players were subjected on a frequent basis, having previously taken for granted some of these attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, having informal knowledge of her participants' ages, S noted that whilst some generational differences in the degree of acceptance of sexist attitudes and behaviour emerged, it was not possible to discern any straightforward correlation between age and a lack of critical perspective, as might perhaps have been expected.

As similarly reported in McGinnis *et al.*'s (2005) research, the women golfers we studied expressed strong concerns at being under surveillance, particularly from male golfers. Whilst we are not claiming that male golfers do not feel similarly 'surveilled' with regard to their golfing techniques and performance, our women participants reported being judged not only for the standard of their play, but also for speed of play as *women*, and, importantly, for their corporeal conformity (or not) to normative constructions of idealised female bodies. The women described feeling obliged to change their behaviour as a response to such 'lived' surveillance, so as to avoid or reduce unwelcome male scrutiny of their play and their bodies. Discourses of women as 'slow' players figured frequently in the women's accounts, with many expressing feelings of pressure to perform and 'get out of the way' of male players. Women golfers were usually termed 'lady golfers' both by male players and, interestingly, also by some female players, many of whom considered this as a discourse of 'respect for the ladies' (a topic we explore in future articles). This marking

of women as 'different' was perhaps not surprising, given both women's and men's socialisation into the cultural milieu of English golf, in which historically patriarchal discourses and practices took 'male-as-norm' (Cole *et al.* 2004). It is perhaps more surprising that such sexism and othering endures into the twenty-first century, despite numerous initiatives within golf and other sports, aimed at increasing inclusivity. The 'marking' as different of women golfers also emerges in the North American context (e.g., McGinnis *et al.* 2005).

Commensurate with our Foucauldian-feminist perspective, however, there was evidence of the potential for women golfers not only to reproduce the discourse and practices of this particular sporting domain, but also to question and resist these, and to transgress gender normative behaviours (see also Pringle and Markula 2005), for example, in playing off the so-called 'men's' tees, and challenging sexist terminology and practices. S, long socialised into the patriarchal discourses of golf, came to question the use of the terms 'lady golfer' and 'the ladies', which she had previously considered unproblematic, and raised the use of this terminology in her interviews. Subsequently, many interviewees indicated that the discussion had made them reflect critically on their own usage of the term. S, who is currently employed in a sport development role within golf, brings not only her lived experience of being a golfing woman but also the findings of the research project to her everyday work-world, seeking to raise awareness of sexism, both institutional/ised and individual, within this particularly sporting domain.

Although not conceived as an action-research project, the findings will nevertheless be made available to organisations, such as England Golf and The Golf Foundation, which have requested summaries, in order to highlight the experiences of women golfers and the barriers they confront with regard to sexist language and

practices within recreational golf. This is particularly important given the current stated aims of these and analogous organisations in working towards reducing barriers, introducing more girls, young people, and women into golf, and increasing the number of regular players and members of golf clubs more widely. As McGinnis *et al.* (2005) argue, attitudes and behaviours that systematically and unnecessarily privilege men in golf, framing 'good golfers' as being male golfers, create an unwelcoming atmosphere for women seeking to enter the sport, making them feel undeserving, discouraged, and thus more likely to drop out of golf. Given the participation rates of women and girls in golf - and in sport generally - remain considerably lower in comparison to those of men and boys, our research may have wider relevance. This is not just in relation to golfing organisations, but to sports policy makers, sports development officers, coaches, parents, teachers, and all those who seek to encourage women and girls to participate more fully and frequently in golf. Sexist discourses and practices that unfoundedly frame women as lacking in golfing and sports ability and skills, and cast them as sexual objects rather than worthy players, discourage women from entering into, and participating in golf and in other sports and physical cultures. This ethnographic and autoethnographic study, whilst based on a small-scale case-study in the English context, nevertheless provides some insight into women's lived experience of encountering such discourses and practices, and thus highlights the need to challenge the still enduring sexist culture that prevails within English golf, and which is changing only gradually.

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Table 1: Participants by handicap category, length of club membership and length of time playing golf

	Novice (0-5 years as member)	Intermediate (6-15 years as member)	Long-standing (16+ years as member)
Handicap Category 1 (up to 5 handicap)			Emily (C)
Handicap Category 2 (6-12 handicap)	Rhea (B)	Hannah (C)	
Handicap Category 3 (13-20 handicap)	Nicole (C)	Kim (C)	Freya (C)
Handicap Category 4 (21-28 handicap)	Kristeen (B)		Gina (L) Jade (L) Marlene (L)
Handicap Category 5 (29-36 handicap)	Luce (B)	Wendy (C)	Julie (L)

Length of time playing golf: Beginner (0 – 5 years) – **B**
Continual (6 – 15 years) – **C**
Long-established (16 plus years) - **L**